(c) RBI had issued the above licences under the previous Branch Licencing Policy 1985-90, which stipulated that there should be a bank branch for every 17000 population in rural/semi-urban areas of each block and that a branch should generally be available within 10kms. of each village. Having regard to the peculiar topography of hill/tribal areas and sprasely populated regions, opening of additional bank branches was considered on the basis of relaxed parameters of an average population of 10,000 per bank office (APPBO). Additional branches were also alloted to ensure that the service area of a rural/semi-urban branch did not normally exceed 15 to 25 villages.

Under the extent Branch Licencing Policy, the emphasis is on all out efforts to improve operational efficiency, quality of assets and financial strength of banks. The opening of bank branches will depend on well established need, business potential and financial viability of the proposed branches.

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Food Allowance to Sainik School Students

6020. SHRIMATI SUSEELA GOPALAN: Will the Minister of FINANCE to be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a long standing demand for increasing the food allowance given to the Sainik School students;

(b) whether the Government propose to increase the food allowance considering the rise in prices of the food articles;

(c) if so, by when; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) Certain demands for increasing the food allowance for Sainik School Students have been received.

(b) and (c). The matter was considered in a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Sainik School Society in January 1991. This meeting recommened, *inter-alia*, the raising of fees as also the per diem food charges of the students The aforesaid recommendation shall be placed before the Board of Governors of Sainik Schools Society for their decision, at their next meeting.

(d) Does not arise.

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Pension Benefits to Employees of Cantoment Boards

6021. SHRI YASHWANTRAO PATIL: Will the Minister of DEFENCE to be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government have received any representation from the employees of Cantoment Boards who retired before April1, 1975, for grant of pension benefits; and

(b) if so, the action taken by the Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) A Pension-cum Gratuity Scheme was sanctioned by the Government for Cantoment Board employees retiring on or after 1-5-1976. As the employees who retired before 1-5-1976 were instead receiving Contributory Provident Fund and bonus they were not eligible for coverage unser the Pension-cum-Gratuity Scheme. Hence, their representations could not be accepted.